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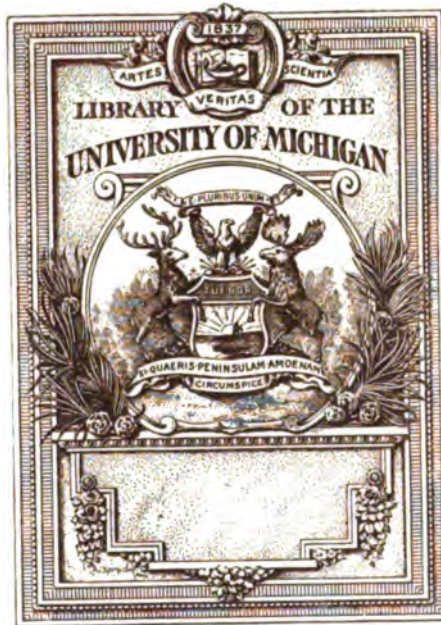
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"PARNASSUS"
TAPESTRY IN THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

BY GEORGE LELAND HUNTER
Author of "Tapestries, Their Origin, History, and Renaissance"

THREE years ago while studying the very beautiful "Parnassus" tapestry that is the crowning glory of the Stuart Collection of The New York Public Library, I was surprised to find it described in the guide to the collection as a Gobelin, of about 1750 to 1770.¹ Several of the men who know most about French tapestries confirmed the attribution as regards the place of production, but of course agreed in recognizing the style not as that of Louis XV (1715-1774), but as that of Louis XIV (1643-1715). They also agreed in pronouncing the tapestry one of the finest specimens of the period in existence.

However, I was unable to bring myself to share their opinion about the place of production, and felt confident that while the tapestry *might* be from the *Beauvais looms*, it was more probably from those of *Brussels*. One day through the kindness of one of the Library officials, I was permitted to examine closely the turned-under bottom selvage of the tapestry. Confidence at once became certainty. Patched into the selvage, which had been much repaired and largely restored, was the Brussels mark, a shield between two B's, the first B standing for Brussels, the second for Brabant, the province of which Brussels is the capital. There was also the signature I. DEVOS, which is that of Josse de Vos (in Latin, Judocus de Vos), who flourished in Brussels at the beginning of the eighteenth century, weaving several important sets of tapestry still preserved in the Imperial Austrian Collection; as well as the "Victories of Marlborough," at Blenheim. The identification once completely established, other interesting facts quickly presented themselves, and on page 103 of my book on "Tapestries," I was able to print the illustration of a similar tapestry in the Royal Swedish Collection — a simplified and inferior version of the one in The New York Public Library. The Swedish tapestry is signed with the Brussels mark, and F. V. D. BORGHT, which

¹ The entry in the "Catalogue of Paintings in the Picture Galleries" is as follows: 191. Apollo and the Muses in the Elysian Fields, with Helios, the Sun God, descending from the Clouds. About 1750-70. Gobelin tapestry, 13½ x 21½ feet. Purchased in 1881.

is the signature of Frans van der Borgh, a Brussels tapestry maker of the second quarter of the eighteenth century. The tapestry was purchased for the King of Sweden, in Brussels in 1745. The Public Library tapestry was acquired for the Stuart Collection in 1881, in Paris, before the revival of interest in tapestries had dragged the facts about them out from ancient diaries and ledgers. Recently it has been cleaned and given the minor repairs that time and dust had made necessary; and the bottom selvage has been turned down and out so that every visitor to the Stuart Collection can see for himself the Brussels mark and the I. DEVOS.

The tapestry is very beautiful and the composition decidedly interesting. The magnificent size, $13\frac{1}{2}$ feet high by $21\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, brings all the details into easy view. The scene is set on Parnassus, the Olympian home of the ancient Greek gods. On the right, under the trees, stands the banqueting table of Jupiter and the other divinities, with Hebe and Ganymede in active service. In the distance arrives Neptune out of the sea, pushing his steeds as if he were late. High up in the sky, far above the chariot of Neptune, is the chariot of the sun. This part of the composition is suggestive of Raphael, and quite in keeping with the work of Jan van Orley, the Brussels painter who flourished at the end of the seventeenth century and who is probably responsible for the design. Apollo himself, lyre in hand, occupies the centre of the scene. Before him, in typical costumes and coiffures of the period of Louis XIV, are the nine Muses, with song books, stringed instruments and even an organ. Above Apollo's head appears Helios the Sun God, whose identity is sometimes the same as that of Apollo, holding the blazing sun that forms a brilliant light source for the whole picture. Out of the woods in the background on the left, two rustic divinities, pipes in hand, peer jealously at the scene of celestial harmony. The border is a woven imitation of gilt frame — the kind introduced at the end of the seventeenth century.

I am well aware that some persons will blame this tapestry because it is not Gothic; others, because it is not Renaissance; still others, because it is not contemporary and modern American. To them I wish to point out that provincialism of taste is quite as distinctive of ignorance as is provincialism of ideas; that nothing is more characteristic of barbarism than a passionate prejudice in favor of a single style, and the expression of that prejudice in meaningless shibboleths. The man who cannot find beauty in all the range of art from classic through romantic to naturalistic, and who is not thrilled by the great creations of the periods of Louis XIV,



"PARADISE"
Temple in The New York Public Library



Louis XV, and Louis XVI, as well as by those of Greece, and Rome, and the Renaissance, and of Gothic, is only part of a man. The "Parnassus" tapestry at the Public Library is a splendid definition of what the style of Louis XIV really is, and attracts the quick admiration of all who have not been educated against it.

It is, of course, hardly necessary here to dwell upon the fact that in the last half of the seventeenth century, Paris became the decorative capital of the world, and the style of Louis XIV the style of the world. The costumes and furniture and architecture of Louis XIV were imitated and reproduced in Spain and Germany as well as in England and Flanders. In Brussels, the weavers not only copied in tapestry the designs of Charles Lebrun; they also wove tapestries from original designs, like the one before us, created by Flemish painters, in the style of Louis XIV.

The tapestry is splendidly hung, where its virtues are fully apparent. The contrast with the easel paintings that surround it is so extreme as to exalt it into a special Parnassus of its own, and make it seem not a part of the contents of the building, but what it really is, a part of the building itself. It shows what a wealth of beauty would be added to the building, could the halls and corridors be hung as the architect, Mr. Hastings, would like, with set upon set of picture tapestries. It deserves to be studied by everyone interested in tapestry as probably the best example of the period in any collection, public or private, in America.



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